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Rise in homeless spurs action

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY: Supervisors create an office to oversee assistance efforts in response to a report.

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THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Responding to a 39 percent increase in San Bernardino County's homeless population in the past five years, county leaders agreed Tuesday to establish an office to oversee efforts to help them.

While homeless rates have

fallen in many areas, including Riverside County, the number of homeless in San Bernardino County grew from 5,270 in 2002 to 7,331 this year, according to a report released Tuesday.

Homeless advocates cited a number of possible reasons for the increase, including rising

foreclosures, a lackluster economy and migration of homeless people from other areas. Some also have accused the county and cities of taking little action to solve the problem.

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors agreed to spend \$350,000 to \$400,000 a year to run a four-person Office of Homeless Services Coordination.

Staff members would work

ON THE WEB

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with the nonprofit Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County to identify gaps in services and assist homeless and low-income individuals and families. They also would sup-
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HOMELESS: Some advocates doubt San Bernardino County or its cities will get serious, take action

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port a new partnership of public and private agencies, faith-based groups, businesses and community members that would develop solutions.

"What was and what is about to change," Supervisor Josie Gonzales said at a news conference.

Until now, homeless prevention and intervention strategies have fallen largely on Community Action Partnership rather than on county government; it was pretty much operating like the "Lone Ranger," said Peter Connery of Applied Survey Research, which conducted February's homeless count for the organization.

'THEY'RE NOT PLAYERS'

Some homeless advocates are skeptical that the county or its cities will get serious and take action.

"The city and county, they're not players," said the Rev. David Kalke in an interview last week. Kalke is pastor of San Bernardino's Central City Lutheran Mission, which provides emergency wintertime shelter to homeless men.

Some critics say Riverside County, where the homeless population dropped from 4,785 in 2005 to 4,508 this year, has done a better job of tackling the problem. Riverside County conducted its first-ever homeless census in 2005.

Riverside County's Department of Public Social Services, working with cities and homeless service providers, expects in October to release a draft 10-year plan to end homelessness.

The plan calls for more emergency shelter beds, temporary housing and low-income housing. It also calls for an expansion of street outreach teams.

Ron Watts, who directs a transitional housing program for men at the Salvation Army in San Bernardino, has sat in on homeless program meetings in Riverside County.

"They were well organized way before us. They are a more polished, tighter organization," Watts said.

Patricia Nickols, Community Action Partnership's chief executive officer, said Tuesday that she is confident the new partnership with the county will yield results. She said she hopes a working group can start drafting a 10-year plan in November and complete it within 12 to 18 months.

A 10-year plan will need to



Peter Connery



Patricia Nickols

address a 6,000-bed shortfall in emergency shelters and temporary housing, according to Community Action Partnership. While the number of homeless has grown, the number of temporary shelter beds has remained virtually the same, Connery said.